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ABSTRACT

This study examined the value orientation of Singapore adolescents toward the three fundamental values of truthfulness, justice, and compassion. A random sample of 315 secondary school students from 4 schools in Singapore (135 males and 180 females) completed a questionnaire, and a select sample of 19 students completed interviews about their perspectives and orientation toward truthfulness, justice, and compassion. The study also examined the effects of family, school, daily activities (including social activities), and the mass media on the values of the adolescents, and it noted gender differences related to value orientation. Each value orientation was tested on three moral concepts. Truthfulness focused on sincerity, honesty, and promise keeping. Justice focused on moral rightness, equity, and fairness. Compassion focused on mercy, care and concern, and benevolence. The questionnaires and interviews asked students to make moral judgements about certain scenarios. Analysis of the data obtained from both the survey and interviews revealed the following: Singapore adolescents were generally truthful, just, and compassionate, but if caught in a moral dilemma of choice between truthfulness and compassion, most showed little or no compassion; families and schools significantly affected the adolescents' fundamental value orientation. Students spent about 3-4 hours daily with television and newspapers; and females were more compassionate than males, but both sexes were equally truthful and just. (Contains 75 references.) (SM)

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VALUE ORIENTATION OF SINGAPORE ADOLESCENTS TOWARDS TRUTHFULNESS, JUSTICE AND COMPASSION

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Title: Value Orientation of Singapore Adolescents towards Truthfulness, Justice and Compassion

Abstract:

Being brought up in a legalistic and meritorious society, adolescents in Singapore seem to have a strong sense of justice and truthfulness for practical purposes, but tend to neglect compassion. This study sought to examine the value orientation of Singapore adolescents towards these three fundamental values, in order to shed more light on the issue.

A sample of 315 secondary two (90 Special Course, 113 Express Course and 112 Normal Academic Course) pupils drawn from four secondary schools in Singapore (135 males and 180 females) were given a questionnaire and a select sample of 19 students were interviewed for their perspective and orientation toward truthfulness, justice and compassion. The effects of family, school and the mass media on the values of Singapore adolescents are also explored . In addition, the study suggest ways to remedy the problems with the value orientation of Singapore adolescents as indicated in the interviews.

Introduction

In recent years, Singapore's economy has developed to become one of the most prosperous and fast moving countries in the region. With a higher standard of living people have become more materialistic and are inclined to be utilitarian and individualistic. Rapid economic and technological development have brought a neglect of good and moral values. The younger generation does not understand the struggles of the earlier generations and having not experienced the hardships faced by their forefathers, they have become rather pragmatic.

Studies have shown that adolescents are generally self-centered and indifferent to national issues. Many of the tasks and choices society requires of them involve the acquisition of values. Erikson (1968) refers to this period of development, the notion of acquiring fidelity and a coherent, consistent and unique sense of "who I am and what I hold dear". The process of identity formation covers the development of self-knowledge, self-confidence and a secure role in society. Many values are actively taking shape in the adolescent's orientation at this time of life.

One of the most comprehensive studies on values in adolescents was done by Roger Straughan (1983). He stated that there are no necessary behavioural criteria to determine whether or not a particular value is held, for there must always remain the possibility of a gap existing between the holding and the enactment of a moral value. Our moral values do often act as a strong motivational influence upon our behaviour, but this is not to admit that we must necessarily always act upon our values, nor even that we must necessarily always want to act upon them. In this case , there is a conflict between two different kinds of reason for action. According to Roubiczeks (1969) in the sphere of values, contradictions are the natural rule. Any attempt to unify the scales by basing them on a common denominator falsifies our judgement.

An individual's values may change from time to time as he/she has to adjust not only to changing internal conditions, but also to external influences, such as wars, economic crises, and changes in social and political institutions that may have lasting effects on developmental outcomes. Mordecai Nisan's (1988) study reveals that many 6 to 7 year old children already demonstrate a distinct adherence to values, and that this distinction develops with age. The child's concept of values is based on his or her perceptions of good personal development, entailing increasing control over the environment, and that these very perceptions affect the child's actual behaviour and development.

In a recent nation wide survey conducted on the values and attitudes of Singapore's youths toward life and work, it was found that Singapore's youths have many positive qualities. They are optimistic, pragmatic and forward-looking and materialistic .They have high motivation and high expectations. They appreciate the value of education and the importance of hard work. While this survey provided some evidence of the values and attitudes of Singapore's youths toward life and work, it did not attempt to measure some of the more specific values. However, in another survey done by the Chinese newspaper Lianhe Zaobao on 500 Chinese youths it was shown that Singapore youths are not an individualistic lot. A large number still participate in community and social activities.

Research Design

This study utilized a survey design, which was a combined quantitative and qualitative approach, involving a paper-and-pencil questionnaire complemented by an interview, to examine the value orientation of our adolescents towards the fundamental values. The design was also meant to explore the effects of family, school, and the mass media on the values of Singapore adolescents. The study aimed, too, at examining whether gender difference relates to value orientation.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the variables that were studied. The dependent variables were adolescents' orientations towards truthfulness, justice and compassion. The independent variables that were studied were family, school and the mass media and their effects on the said value orientations.

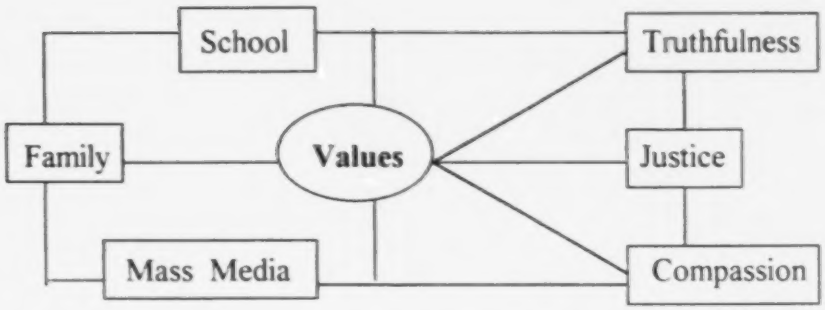

Figure 1 Framework of Study

The Sample

In the selection of the sample of adolescents for this study, three criteria were used, namely, type of school, class level of pupils and course of pupils. These criteria ensured a homogeneous population.

The sample for this study was drawn from four secondary schools in Singapore: two of which were government schools, and the others were government - aided schools. Both government schools were neighbourhood schools, [5] one of which was an autonomous [6] school. One of the government - aided schools was a religious mission school which was also an autonomous school.

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[5] Neighbourhood schools are government schools which are located in the housing estates, to provide education to the majority of our pupils.

[6] Autonomous schools are government or government-aided schools. They are given additional funds and more leeway to execute their mission of providing quality education. These schools are well-spread out geographically for the convenience of pupils living in different parts of the island. They are set up to give pupils more choice of schools. They, too conform to national education policies.

This study involved only secondary two pupils. This was because secondary two pupils were in the secondary schools for at least one year. They were more settled and more comparable. (Secondary one pupils would have just been promoted from the primary schools and they were yet to adapt to the new environment and secondary school life. Secondary three and four pupils would have been streamed according to courses. They would be less comparable with their peers due to the different subject combinations they were studying.)

In order to have a holistic picture of the secondary two pupils, various courses on the level i.e. Special [7], Express [8] and Normal (Academic) [9] were taken into consideration. This was also to find out whether differences on academic performance and streaming had any effect on pupils' values.

Out of the four schools sampled , one was a SAP (Special Assistance Plan) [10] school which offered Special course. The other three schools were normal schools which offered Express and Normal(Academic) courses.

Based on the selection criteria, a total of 315 subjects were randomly selected. The distribution of subjects by gender, course and type of school is shown in **Table 1**.

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[7] The Special course provides able pupils with the opportunity to study English and the mother tongue at a higher level, that is, Higher Chinese, Higher Malay or Higher Tamil. At the end of Secondary Four, they sit the GCE "O" level examination.

[8] The Express course also prepares pupils for the GCE "O" level examination in four years. Unlike pupils in the Special course, pupils study English and the mother tongue, that is, Chinese, Malay or Tamil.

[9] Pupils in the Normal (Academic) course have, as compulsory subjects, English, the mother tongue and Mathematics. Pupils sit the GCE "N" level examination at the end of the fourth year. Those who meet the criteria go on for a fifth year of study. On obtaining good results at the GCE "O" level examination, they can proceed to the junior colleges, polytechnics or technical institutes. Many of the pupils who complete the Normal course in the fourth year, after sitting the GCE "N" level examination, are likely to take up technical and vocational education at the technical institutes.

[10] The Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools are established to maintain high standards in both English and Chinese whilst preserving the traditional ethos existing in the schools. The secondary SAP schools offer the Special course where pupils learn English and Chinese at a higher level.

Table 1. Sample Composition by Gender, Course and Type of School

Schools	Gender		Course		
	Male	Female	Special	Express	Normal(A)
School (1)	26	64	90		
School (2)	41	41		40	42
School (3)	32	38		37	33
School (4)	36	37		36	37
Total	135	180	90	113	112

Note. N=315

The sample comprised 135 males and 180 females. All the 90 pupils from school (1) were Special course pupils. There were 40 Express and 42 Normal(A) pupils from school (2); 37 Express and 33 Normal(A) pupils from school(3) and 36 Express and 37 Normal(A) pupils from school(4).

Based on the initial findings of the paper-and-pencil questionnaire, four significant pupils from each school were identified for interview. For the SAP school, seven significant pupils were identified. These nineteen pupils constituted the subjects for the purposive sample. They were identified for interview on the following basis:

(i). a balanced number of males and females from each school.

(ii). a balanced number of pupils from the Special, Express and Normal(A) courses.

(iii). pupils who obtained high scores in their commitment to truthfulness, justice or compassion.

Instrumentation

The instruments used for this study were paper-and-pencil questionnaire and interview.

1. Paper-and-pencil questionnaire (Appendix A)

This was a self-designed instrument. The questionnaire was designed to suit the purpose of this study. Except for demographic items, all the items were constructed along the line of enquiry concerning the three fundamental values, viz. truthfulness, justice and compassion. Under each value, there were three moral concepts which had been defined in the section on "Definition of Key Terms and Concepts" in the first chapter of this dissertation.

The questionnaire mainly asked about the adolescents' family life, school life, and daily activities, including social activities. Some of the question items were developed with the local school situation and the Asian cultural context in mind.

Table 2. Outline of the Paper-and-pencil Questionnaire

Subscale/Section	Variables	Moral Concepts	Item no.
Subscale 1(Section A) (Items 1 - 24)	Demographic Inf.		1 -- 11
	Family		12-- 20
	Mass Media (newspaper)		21-- 22
	Mass Media (TV)		23-- 24
Subscale 2(Section B) (Items 25 - 51)	Truthfulness	Sincerity	25 27 30
		Honesty	28 31 33
		Keeping promises	26 29 32
	Justice	Moral rightness	34 39 40
		Equity	35 37 41
		Fairness	36 38 42
	Compassion	Mercy	46 49 50
		Care and concern	45 48 51
		Benevolence	43 44 47
Subscale 3(Section C) (Items 52 - 78)	Truthfulness	Sincerity	52 55 59
		Honesty	53 58 60
		Keeping promises	54 56 57
	Justice	Moral rightness	61 64 69
		Equity	62 65 67
		Fairness	63 66 68
	Compassion	Mercy	73 76 77
		Care and concern	72 75 78
		Benevolence	70 71 74
Subscale 4(Section D) (Items 79 - 80)	Justice & Compassion		79
	Truthfulness & compassion		80

Table 2 presents the outline of the paper-and-pencil questionnaire. As indicated in **Table 2**, the 80 item questionnaire consisted of four sections each constituting a subscale.

In subscale 1 (section A), there were 24 multiple - choice questions (MCQ) items. Items 1 to 11 covered demographic and background information. Items 12 to 24 were questions pertaining to family and mass media effects.

In subscale 2 (section B), there were 27 items. Each of the three fundamental values we have described above, i.e. truthfulness, justice and compassion, was tested on three moral concepts. The adolescents' orientation towards each moral concept was tested by three items. For instance, under truthfulness, there were three items each on sincerity, honesty and keeping promises; under justice, there were also three items each on moral rightness, equity and fairness; and under compassion, there were again three items each on mercy, care and concern, and benevolence. Each item described a moral situation and provided four statements to justify it. Pupils were to choose what to them was the best statement. This subscale resembled Rest's (1979) Defining Issues Test. [11] The following is an example:

Item 25 (section B)

My friend who could not turn up earlier at the stadium asked me to reserve a seat for him her,

(1). I forgot all about it when I saw other friends at the stadium.
(2). I told him her it's difficult to reserve a seat at the stadium.
(3). I reserved a seat for him her as soon as I took my seat.
(4). Others (please specify)

In subscale 3 (section C), there were also 27 items. The allocation of items here were similar to that of subscale 2 (section B) , i.e. three items were developed to cover a moral concept. Each item was in the form of a statement whose truth or appropriateness was measured on a 4- point Likert scale, viz. 1 never, 2 sometimes,

[11] The Defining Issues Test (DIT) asks individuals to read a series of dilemmas and rate the importance of "moral issue" statements in deciding on a course of action.

3.often, and 4.always. Students were to choose what to them seemed the best of the measures 1 to 4. For example:

Item 52 (section C)

If you know your close friend's weaknesses, do you mention to him/her? Why?

In subscale 4(section D), there were 2 items. Each item presented a description of a scenario involving a moral dilemma being faced of a clash of two moral principles. Subjects were to choose 'Yes' or 'No' to indicate their agreement to the resolution suggested, and give reasons for their answer. This subscale (section) was constructed taking into consideration Kohlberg's (1984) Moral Judgement Interview. [12] The two items (items 79 & 80) of section D are as follows:

Item 79 (section D)

You are a school prefect. You station yourself at the school gate every morning to collect bus passes from the late comers. They are to be retained after school. This morning, one of your close friends comes late and she explains to you that she is late because she has stomach-ache early in the morning. Will you collect her bus pass? Why?

Item 80 (section D)

You are the class monitor. Some of your classmates have been caught playing in the classroom when the teacher was not around. One of them is your best friend who has helped you before. The principal has been informed and he wants you to submit the names of all those involved to him. Will you submit the names of all those involved, including your best friend's name to the principal? Why?

[12] Kohlberg's Moral Judgement Interview (Kohlberg, 1984) refers to a series of structured interviews centering on material that present conflicts. Each interview includes at least three conflicts, such as between altruism and legal violations, between regard for one's personal conscience and meting out punishment, between maintaining a contract and holding a bond legitimate social authority, and so on. This approach to moral values attempts to ignore moral content and to evaluate the justification for the decision of each interviewee in terms of the form or structure of their rationale.

2. Interview of pupils (Appendix B)

In order to collaborate and to confirm the more significant findings of the paper-and -pencil questionnaire, interviews were conducted. Based on the initial findings, significant subjects were identified for the interview. A questionnaire was constructed to serve as a guide for the interview. It consisted of three parts:

Part I -- there were three sections in part I.

Section 1 (items 1 to 6) -- these items concerned the respondent himself/herself.

Section 2 (items 7 to 12) -- each item described a situation and respondents were to express and explain their reaction to the situation.

Section 3 (items 13 to 15) -- these items concerned peers of the respondents. Respondents had to express their views about their peers.

Part II -- there were five scenarios, each involving a moral conflict. Scenario 5 was drawn from Kohlberg's Heinz dilemma.[13] Respondents were asked to make moral judgements with regard to the scenarios. The research paradigm here was to present respondents with a series of hypothetical dilemmas and to ask them to respond to probing questions.

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[13] The "Heinz dilemma" asks subjects to choose between the value of obeying the law (not stealing) and the value of human life (saving a dying person). Kohlberg emphasized that it is the structure of the answer -- the way an individual reasons about the dilemma, and not the content of the response that determines moral maturity.
The brief characterizations of the six stages are: Stage 1. The punishment and obedience orientation. Stage 2. The instrumental purpose orientation. Stage 3. The "good boy - good girl" orientation, or the morality of interpersonal cooperation. Stage 4. The social - order - maintaining orientation. Stage 5. The social - contract orientation. Stage 6. The universal ethical principle orientation.

Findings

Analysis of the data obtained from both the survey and interviews reveal the following:

1. Generally speaking, Singapore adolescents are truthful, just and compassionate. However, if they are caught in a moral dilemma of choice between being truthful and just on the one hand, and being compassionate on the other, the majority of them are inclined towards truthfulness and justice, but showed little or no compassion. Results showed positive correlations between truthfulness and justice (0.49) between truthfulness and compassion (0.61) and a slightly lower correlation between compassion and justice. (0.31). The interviews confirm that Singapore adolescents are truthful in being sincere and honest and frequently keeping their promises. They are just in having a high regard for moral rightness and equity and they very often do things in a fair manner. They are compassionate, in being helpful, merciful and benevolent and they often show care and concern for others, but when they were asked to make a moral judgement on a situation involving facing a moral dilemma between two values, the majority of them tended to choose either truthfulness or justice rather than compassion. They prioritise truthfulness and justice more highly than compassion.

2. Families, being one of the primary socialization agents in Singapore, have significant effects on the fundamental value orientation of the adolescents. This is so with regard to their commitment to truthfulness and compassion but no significant effect with regard to their attitude to justice. It is interesting to note that about half of the respondents in the interview confirmed that their parents always stressed that they had to work hard for good examination results but only some of their parents always reminded them to show compassion to others.

3. The school environment in Singapore makes a difference in adolescents' value orientation. All Singapore schools do administer a common curriculum but different schools do differ in their programmes for inculcating values in pupils. Schools promote values through selection of teaching materials, classroom organisation and instructional procedure. School ethos are important where students' imbibing of moral values are concerned. Analysis shows significant differences between schools in pupils' value orientation, which are explainable by differences in school environment.

4. Adolescents spend about 3-4 hours daily (87.3%) on TV and newspapers. The survey shows that adolescents spend more time watching TV than reading newspapers. About 80% of them spend at least 1 hour watching TV every day and 75% spend less than 1 hour reading newspapers daily. About 79% enjoy comedy and drama on TV and 61% enjoy reading sports news. Not many are interested in current affairs or world news and are quite indifferent to important political world issues.

5. Both survey and interview findings show that females (mean score=33.74) tend to be more compassionate than males (mean score=32.13). This result supports Gilligan's (1988) finding that women prioritise care and compassion in interpersonal relations more highly than men. However, there is no significant relationship between males and females with regard to their attitude towards truthfulness and justice which are valued highly by both females and males. Both highly value self-control, honesty, ambition, intelligence and politeness.

Implications

The present study indicates that the typical Singapore adolescent is optimistic, pragmatic, forward-looking and materialistic. Living in a fast-moving and competitive society, the majority of them have become more and more pragmatic and indifferent to values. Educational authorities would have to develop programs to counteract this unhealthy wave of apathy. Many of them would not take part in voluntary work because they are too busy with their school work. Schools and colleges would have to redesign their school curriculum to put more stress on community service and involvement.

The positive roles contributed by peers are to be highlighted by parents and teachers. Many of the adolescents are influenced largely by their friends and they turn to them when they have personal problems. Their value acquisitiion is affected by peer influence, be it positive or negative. Similar research have also found that peer group opinion tend to determine the kinds of behaviour that are to be approved, rejected or ignored among group members.

The importance of the family as a source of influence should not be underestimated. The complementary positions of family and school should be well coordinated when practising value education. Schools can gain support from families through parent-teacher conferences or parents day activities and they can in fact help mould an environment conducive to appropriate values acquisition. The need to inculcate desirable moral values is important in today's conflicting moral signals facing these adolescents. The present civic and moral education syllabus for secondary schools need to be revised and more emphases be given to certain values such as compassion and humility.

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